

Alligator Facts

Common name: American alligator
Scientific name: *Alligator mississippiensis*

Appearance: Alligators have long, armored, lizard-like bodies with flat muscular tails. They have long, rounded, shovel-shaped snouts with nostrils at the end to breathe, while most of the body is under the water. They have four short legs with five toes on the front feet and four on the rear. The skin on the back is armored with rows of embedded bony plates called osteoderms. Young alligators have bright yellow stripes and blotches, but adults are black with pale bellies. Adults range in size from 6-feet for females to 14-feet for males, and weigh about 600 pounds.

Range: Alligators are found all over the Southeastern United States. There are large populations in Florida, and coastal areas of Louisiana. Smaller populations are found in Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

Habitat: Large shallow lakes, marshes, ponds, swamps, rivers, creeks, and canals in fresh water; and areas with brackish water (a mix of salt and fresh water).

Diet: Smaller alligators eat insects, snails and small fish. Larger alligators eat fish, birds, turtles, snakes, and mammals.

Young: Females lay about 40 eggs that hatch in 60 - 70 days. Hatchlings are 8-to-10 inches long.

Growth: How big and fast alligators grow depends on temperature and the amount of food available for them to eat. A large alligator may be 25-years-old.

Reproduction: Alligators are able to reproduce at about 8-13 years of age, when they are about 6-to-7 feet long. The temperature of the egg while it is in the nest will determine the sex. Cooler temperatures produce females, and higher temperatures produce males. Alligator nests are mounds made of mud, soil, plants, sticks, and leaves. They are built and guarded by the females.

Reproductive Behavior: Mating season is in early spring, and nests are built and eggs laid in late spring and summer. Alligators are the most territorial during mating season, and may be aggressive toward intruders.

Alligator Safety: Alligators have attacked people, and most attacks happen when they have been fed by humans or when they are defending their nests.

To be safe: 1. Do not feed alligators; 2. Swim only in designated swimming areas; 3. Report nuisance alligators that are more than 4-feet-long and appear to have lost their natural fear of people or otherwise pose a threat to people or property to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 1-888-404-3922. Captured reported animals may be removed to protect humans and their pets.

Legal Aspects: American alligators are listed by the state of Florida as a species of concern and by the federal government as threatened due to the similarity in appearance to the endangered American Crocodile. It is illegal to feed, tease, harass, molest, capture, or kill alligators. Violations or suspicious activity should be reported.

